

Part 2: Public Transportation

Overview

Public transportation also plays a very important role for many residents and businesses in the region. Wichita Transit provides a basic fixed route bus system and associated paratransit service for the City of Wichita. A number of suggested enhancements to this service were received during public meetings and stakeholder interviews. The primary concern was for extending evening service until midnight.

Background

Current System

Wichita Transit provides the City of Wichita with fixed-route bus service for the general public and paratransit van service for individuals with special mobility needs. The transit system currently operates 51 buses (all ADA compliant) on 18 fixed routes (Figure 3.2-1 on page 3-17), 17 demand-response paratransit routes, and 5 paratransit vans operated under a lease program with other social service agencies. Federal guidelines require paratransit service for 0.75 mile either side of a fixed bus route. Wichita Transit exceeds the service area requirements of the ADA by providing paratransit service to the entire city. Travel time across the city on the fixed-route system is approximately 90 minutes. The current system provides service to those areas with higher percentages of low-income and minority populations.

Hours of Operation

Wichita Transit operates its bus routes from 5:22 AM - 6:45 PM, Monday-Friday, and from 6:22 AM - 5:45 PM on Saturdays. The buses do not run on Sundays or major holidays (New Years Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day). The Downtown Transit Center is open from 6:00 AM - 6:30 PM on weekdays, and 7:30 AM - 5:30 PM on Saturdays.

Facilities

The Transit Operations Center is able to house most WT vehicles and provides space for the dispatch centers for fixed route bus and paratransit van services. The facility also contains six maintenance work bays, a body/paint shop, and fuels diesel buses/trolleys, gasoline vans, and support vehicles.



The Downtown Transit Center is the transfer site for most WT routes. It has 24 parking bays for buses and/or vans. The building itself has a large waiting area for passengers, public facilities, an information booth, and some office space for Access to Jobs staff.



Ridership

Annually, Wichita Transit carries approximately 1.9 million passengers on the fixed route bus service, and provides over 330,000 for persons with disabilities with paratransit service. Ridership on the fixed route buses has declined since 1996 when a reduction in federal operating funding led to a decrease in transit service. The East Harry route and the South Main route have the highest ridership on the system. Ridership is expected to increase 25-30 percent over the next 25 years due to the increases in aging population and overall population and employment growth. Demand for paratransit service will likely increase at a higher rate than fixed-route service.

Access to Jobs Program

A federal grant provides funding for rides to individuals in transition from welfare to work. Individuals must be within 150% of poverty level. The agency must provide 50% co-pay per ride. Each ride is a one-way ride. The individual's entire income must be considered when determining program eligibility (i.e., SSI, SSDI, wages, etc.).

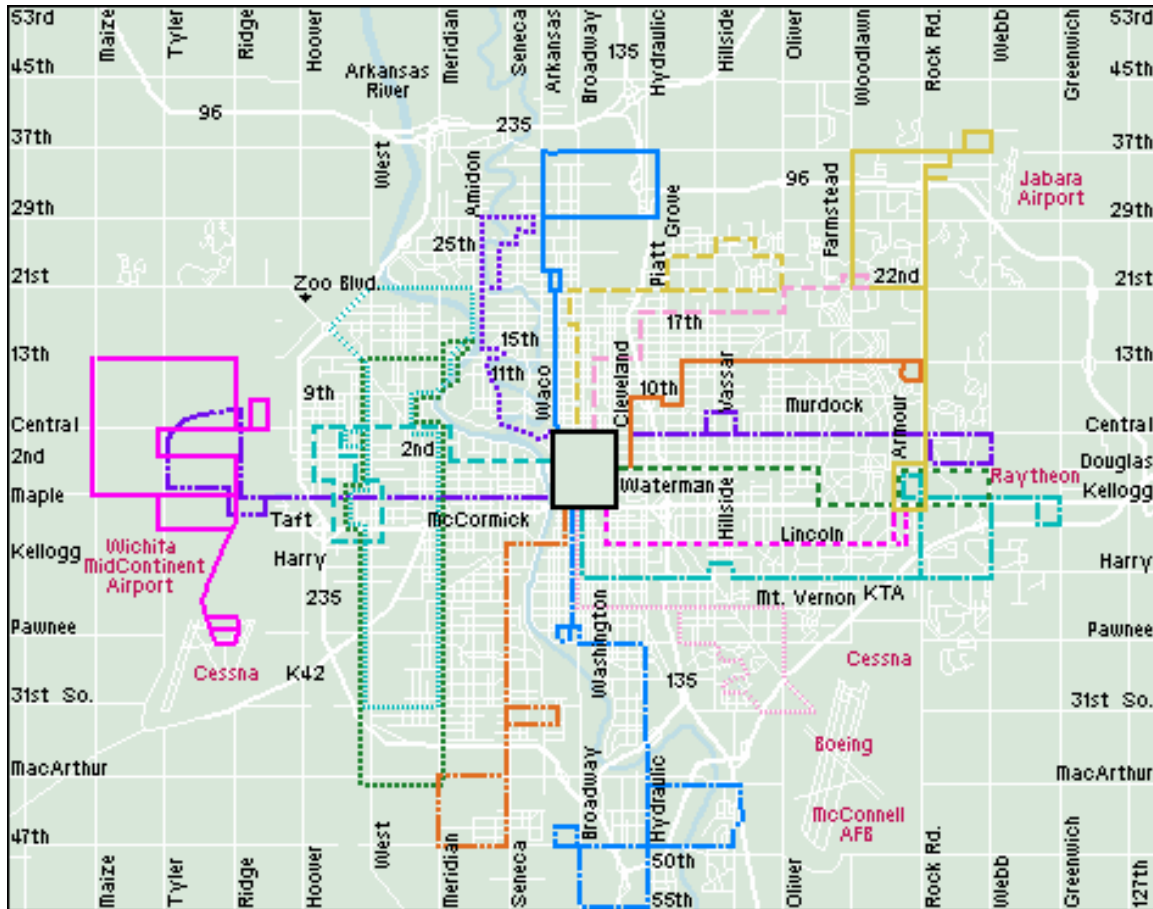
Transit-Oriented Development

Transit-oriented development is the design and development of land in proximity to transit facilities, such as major fixed route transfer points or park and ride lots that encourage people to use mass transit. In essence, transit-oriented development (TOD) results in bringing more people and more businesses to an area served by transit and providing a more pedestrian friendly environment.

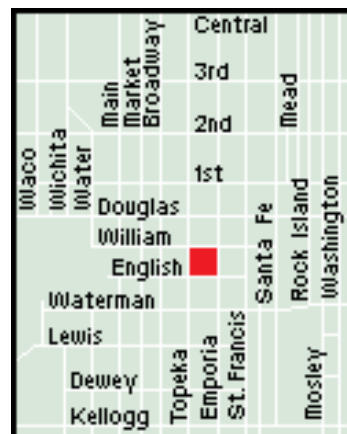
The purpose of TOD is to build active and convenient communities that, through the convenient availability of transit, link people and their jobs as well as to commercial, retail, medical and entertainment centers. TOD can be a tool to spur neighborhood revitalization in disinvested areas, promote more efficient use of a city's transportation network, and protect a region's natural environment.

TOD can help improve the environment. Reduction of vehicle miles of travel can help to lower air pollution, congestion and the need for roadway expansion. Greater densities of housing and jobs near transit facilities can help to reduce pressures to extend public infrastructure to fringe and remote locations. TOD can help to preserve natural resources, such as flood plains, prime agricultural land, wetlands and open space.

Wichita Transit Bus Routes



ROUTE KEY			
1. Rock Rd. Shuttle	10. W. Central		
2. E. Harry	11. N. Waco		
3. E. Lincoln	12. Riverside		
4. S. Broadway	13. N. Broadway		
5. S. Seneca	14. E. Central		
6. S. Main	15. E. 13th		
7. S. Meridian/ West St. Loop	16. College Hill		
8. N. Meridian/ West St. Loop	17. E. 17th		
9. W. Maple	18. Westside Connector		



Downtown Insert Map

■ Transit Center

Figure 3.2-1: Wichita Transit Bus Routes

Regional Public Transportation Needs

Several regional public transportation needs were identified during the public meetings and interviews with transportation stakeholders. These requests include:

- Extended hours of service during weekdays and Saturdays.
- Public transportation service on Sundays.
- Improve the frequency of service of bus routes.
- “Real-time” notification of bus arrivals.
- Public transportation service expansion to the outlying cities.
- Express bus service across Wichita and from outlying areas to downtown.
- “Park and Ride” facilities on major roadway approaches to Wichita.
- A detailed study the public transportation needs of the region.
- More door-to-door paratransit rather than curb-to-curb service.
- Additional funding must be identified to support both fix-route and paratransit service.
- Land use controls to encourage transit-friendly developments.
- Bicycle racks on the buses.
- Improve passenger amenities (new bus shelters, benches and signage).

Evening Service Cost Analysis

The most important need identified by the public was the need for weekday and Saturday evening service. Most requests were to continue service until midnight or 12:30 AM. The lack of these service hours impacts those persons who are transit-dependent and their ability to travel to and from 2nd and 3rd shift jobs.

The estimated costs of extending full fixed-route bus service and its associated paratransit service are based on the following assumptions:

- Extending full bus service (17 routes).
- Each hour of extended bus service equates annually to an additional 4,284 hours of bus operation on these routes.
- Operating costs are estimated to be \$38 per hour; therefore each additional hour of full bus service in the evening would cost approximately \$162,800 per year.
- Paratransit service is provided along with the fixed route bus service.
- The cost of providing 5 vans for paratransit service is estimated to be \$32,800 per year for each additional hour of evening service.

Extending bus and paratransit service costs approximately \$196,000 a year for each additional hour of service. For example, extending service for six additional hours would have an annual cost of approximately \$1,174,000.

A pilot program for evening service along selected routes using vans is an approach that should be considered. While funding would still need to be identified, this is a lower-cost approach when compared to full service.

Transit Development Program

Wichita Transit is preparing to update their Transit Development Program (TDP), a 5-year plan for the operation of public transportation in the Wichita urban area. The TDP is a planning tool that will investigate:

- Operating efficiencies.
- Potential to expand service: routes, hours, headways.
- Bus-only facilities: lanes, ramps.
- Transit-oriented development.
- Park and ride facilities.
- Marketing of public transportation services.
- Pricing structure.
- Funding for public transportation.
- Citizen needs and suggestions.

The TDP should investigate retaining the existing radial-pulse route system or implementing a different system.

Currently Programmed Improvements

In addition to the funding necessary to continue the existing level of transit service, the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) notes that federal and state funds have been secured to provide for the following transit projects:

Q-Line Shuttle: The Q-Line provides shuttle service in downtown Wichita. A total of \$100,000 per year is provided from 2005-2007.

Rideshare Program: Software to improve Wichita Transit's ability to coordinate car pool requests. A total of \$40,000 per year is provided from 2005-2007.

WSU Basketball Shuttle: Shuttle service from outlying areas to Wichita State University's basketball arena. A total of 20,000 per year is provided from 2005-2007.

Air Show Shuttle: Shuttle service provided only during the air show. A total of \$20,000 per year is provided from 2005-2007.

Wichita Transit also has a current project to install 45 bus shelters along its bus routes, with an additional 30 shelters installed in the next 3 years. Also, up to 300 new benches are planned to be installed.

Recommended Public Transportation Projects

Through development of the TDP determine if, where, and how the fix-route bus system can be made more efficient. The TDP should also review bus headways and overall travel times. Some express bus service should be considered to lower the 90 minute travel time across the City of Wichita.

Identify funding to implement a pilot project for evening public transportation service. This service could begin as a modest program and expand over time as usage warrants.

Investigate the use of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) technologies such as Automatic Vehicle Location, Automatic Stop Announcement, Computerized Scheduling, Real-Time Bus Information at bus stops, Wireless Communications, and Bus Traffic Signal Priority.

Outlying cities should investigate the availability of federal, state, or local funds if they wish to attract bus service to their areas. An option exists to contract with Wichita Transit to provide this service.

Summary

Public transportation plays a vital role for many citizens, including both choice riders and transit-dependant. A basic fixed-route bus system is operated by Wichita Transit.

An aging population and overall regional population and employment growth will likely lead to an increased demand for public transportation.

Many of the citizens who attended the LRTP public meetings brought concerns, issues, and suggestions regarding bus and paratransit service. The primary need that they identified was for weekday and Saturday evening transit service for citizens who work 2nd and 3rd shift jobs. This change in transit service will also provide opportunities for shopping and recreation.

Wichita Transit will soon begin the 5-year TDP update. The TDP should identify and evaluate opportunities to improve the efficiency of the existing fixed-route bus and paratransit service. Opportunities for expanded service should also be explored.

